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AUTHOR Hagen, Gerald W.
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ABSTRACT

West Fargo Community High School (North Dakota) was established in 1982 to provide alternative secondary education to high school dropouts and students who would be unable to function successfully in the traditional high school setting. The school was set up to be a self-supporting institution staffed by three part-time instructors and one part-time paraprofessional; its approach was a hybrid of traditional classroom-based instruction and individualized instruction. Upon entering the program, students develop an educational program consisting of eight 1/2-credit courses that are completed in a 4-week time block system. Time extensions are granted for students who have been working at their full capacity; students judged not to have been working at capacity must pay a $2 fee for a time extension. Despite school board disagreements resulting in separate diplomas for graduates of the district's traditional and alternative high schools and delays in instruction caused by the fact that the alternative school was set up as a correspondence program, the West Fargo Community High School is filling a definite need and has been successful. The main problems still facing the school are inadequate funding and continued resistance to placing the alternative and traditional programs on an equal footing. (MN)

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CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE WEST FARGO SCHOOL DISTRICT - AN ANALYSIS

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by

Gerald W. Hagen

Principal and Director of Adult

and Community Education

West Fargo Public School District

West Fargo, ND

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CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE WEST FARGO SCHOOL DISTRICT - AN ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores a major change for the West Fargo School District #6, West Fargo, ND. It involves the broad implications of initiating an entirely new program as well as departing from the norm in considerations for staffing and curriculum. The need for the change will be identified, as well as the procedures undertaken to initiate the change. Also under discussion will be the positions held by those forces opposing the change. In addition, the evolutionary modifications that have occurred in the program since implementation will be detailed, as well as additional changes that are needed. The paper will conclude with a summary of several major components of the West Fargo Model that could be considered for implementation in other school districts.

The change in the West Fargo School District under consideration is the West Fargo Community High School. The Community High School is an alternative high school which was established to provide secondary education to high school drop-outs and students who are unable to function successfully in the traditional high school setting. The alternative high school was started in the fall of 1982 in response to a need that was only then perceived.

The realization that a need existed for an alternative type high school evolved slowly in West Fargo. It gradually developed from the

finding that a population of students enrolling in the adult education program were not being well served. The adult education program was geared to serve adult basic education students who were functioning below grade eight in their basic skill areas as well as adults preparing for the General Educational Development (G.E.D.) for the most part, functioning at the secondary skill level. The then, state age requirements for students taking the G.E.D. high school equivalency examination was nineteen years. (Later the law was changed so that eighteen year old students, whose class had graduated could take the G.E.D.) There were a few exceptions to this rule that were granted by the Department of Public Instruction, one being students who needed the G.E.D. to enter military service. There was not, however, any established way to serve the sixteen year old high school drop-out who came to the program. It did not make sense to put that student in a holding pattern and begin preparation for a G.E.D. examination that they could not take until age nineteen.

To try to solve this problem an informal relationship with The Division of Independent Study, which is a state supported correspondence school, began. The Coordinator of Adult Education arranged for some of the young students to take courses by correspondence through the Division. The courses were supervised by the Coordinator and the daily work was mailed to the Division for correction. The tests which were mailed from the Division, were also administered by the Coordinator and then mailed back to the Division. During this period the West Fargo High School administration sent a few students to the adult education program to work on independent study courses. These were students who were not fitting into the traditional high school setting; or with the in-house student

drop-out prevention program that was in place. This drop-out prevention center was called the Lighthouse. The Lighthouse provided extra tutoring and counselling to identified potential drop-outs. Yet there were students who could not function properly in the atmosphere of a high school consisting of 950 students for a variety of unspecified reasons. It was this type of student the school district asked the personnel in the adult education program to work with.

During this time the superintendent acted as an intermediary between the high school and the adult education program. Before a student who was enrolled at the high school could be transferred to the adult education program the superintendent had to give his approval. This procedure was started during the 1981-82 school year.

This arrangement was the beginning of several conflicts between the regular high school and the alternative program. The main area of disagreement centered around who had control of students that were sent from the high school. The conflicts surfaced as traditional turf problems. The high school basically wanted to retain complete control of these students. The thinking of the adult education staff was that if the students were removed from the high school and placed in the alternative program, jurisdiction should rest with the new setting.

The Coordinator of Adult Education began to realize that if the program was going to properly serve the high school age student in this non-traditional setting, a formalized program would have to be established. As the type of student being served in the developing alternative program did not fit the guidelines of a traditional adult education program, the question became what type of alternative

program should be proposed for the West Fargo School District. Data needed to be gathered to properly answer this question.

The Director of Adult Education and Community Education and the Coordinator of Adult Education approached the superintendent with the idea that some type of alternative high school was needed. The superintendent said he was not opposed to the idea but did give some very tough guidelines. First, the alternative program would have to be self-supporting. Secondly, he would need additional data indicating district-wide need before he could recommend such a program to the school board for adoption. It was felt that data could be gathered that would support the establishment of an alternative high school program but being able to make that program self-supporting and still have a quality program was another matter. It was this question that conditioned staff thinking when developing the model.

In order to collect the data, means had to be developed that would answer the following questions:

A. Whether there was evidence of a need in the community for such a school.

B. Whether a school of this nature could be self-supporting.

To assess the community need, data were used:

1. The drop-out rate of West Fargo Schools over the last six years.

2. The enrollment of West Fargo residents in Woodrow Wilson Community High School in Fargo during the past three school years.

3. A survey in the Community Education brochure which is mailed directly to all head of households (5480) in the West Fargo School District asking whether there were students in the household fitting the age and residency requirements who would be interested in such a school.

The same questionnaire was also included in the Midweek Eagle which is a weekly advertising paper that is delivered to all area residences free of charge.

Once these steps were taken an assessment of community need could be undertaken. The first criteria to be analyzed was the drop-out rate in the West Fargo School District. An analysis of the data indicated the following:

Number of drop-outs by year

TABLE I

YEAR	NO. OF STUDENTS DROPPED OUT
1980-81	30
1979-80	42
1978-79	37
1977-78	48
1976-77	37
1975-76	39
	TOTAL 233 AV. PER YR. 38.8

When rounded off this figure becomes 39 students

TABLE II Number of Drop-outs by Year and Grade Level.

YEAR	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade	TOTALS
1980-81	2	14	3	11	30
1979-80	5	12	15	10	42
1978-79	4	13	13	7	37
1977-78	2	18	18	10	48
1976-77	2	13	13	9	37
1975-76	1	7	17	14	39
TOTAL	16	77	79	61	233
% of TOTAL	7%	33%	34%	26%	

TABLE II displays the grade attained by the student when he/she dropped out of school, the total number of students by grade and the per cent of the total drop-out population by grade. By multiplying the per cent at a given grade level times the average number of students (39) the number of students expected to drop out of school and the grade level they will have attained at the time of drop-out can be projected. The results of utilizing this method indicated that 3 - 9th graders, 13 - 10th graders, 13 - 11th graders and 10 - 12th graders would likely drop out of school. The data indicated that a majority of those students attaining junior or senior class standing, would within a year, attempt to complete their education through Adult Basic and Secondary Education Classes, or through an alternative program such as that offered by the Woodrow Wilson Community High School. The figures supplied by the principal of the Woodrow Wilson Community High School substantiated those projections.

The results from looking at the West Fargo student enrollment in the Woodrow Wilson Community High School indicated the following:

WEST FARGO STUDENTS AT WOODROW WILSON

1980-81	20
1979-80	10
1978-79	3

The number of students increased seven fold since 1978-79, despite the burden of the students having to pay $150.00 per month tuition to attend the Fargo school. This data in itself indicated a need for an alternative type high school in West Fargo.

RESULTS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Twenty responses had been received to the questionnaire as of February 15, 1982 when the data was reviewed to determine if the interest warranted further exploration.

The twenty returns were answered as follows:

Is there anyone in your household between the ages of 16-21 who has dropped out of high school for 6 months or longer?
20 yes 0 no.

Has this person talked about getting his/her diploma someday?
20 yes 0 no.

Would this person enroll in an Alternative School where he/she could earn between 5-10 credits during a school year?
17 yes 0 no.

From the response to the survey it was determined a minimum of 17 students could be expected to enroll during the first registration period. It was suspected that the survey could be low due to the nature of the survey. Had a separate sheet of paper and self-addressed postage paid envelope been provided the response could have very well been higher. As it was, people were expected to read, cut out and put a twenty cents stamp on an envelope and mail it in.

Conclusions

It was concluded a need did exist for a Community High School in West Fargo. All three measures used to assess this need indicated that:

1. There was a population of drop-outs that could benefit from the availability of a Community High School.
2. At least twenty West Fargo residents were paying $150.00 every 4 weeks to attend the Woodrow Wilson Alternative High School in Fargo, ND. The principal of Woodrow Wilson was very supportive of our attempts to start a similar program in West Fargo because he said he found it very difficult to serve our students due to the fact he was operating with a waiting list of students to enter Woodrow Wilson.
3. The response to the survey produced at least 17 persons who stated they would attend such a school.

This indicated need, coupled with the service potential for students in outlying school districts in the county led to a recommendation that if an Alternative High School could be self-supporting, then West Fargo should begin an Alternative School in the 1982-83 school year.

Considerations for Funding a Community High School

The funding of a Community High School would depend almost entirely on State Foundation Aid monies. Some additional monies would be derived from tuition and registration fees, but these monies would be insignificant. Therefore, the weight of the decision of whether the Alternative School could be self-supporting rested with the amount of foundation aid that could be generated. The following budget was submitted as part of the initial proposal:

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL BUDGET

	Expenses	Income
Foundation Aid		$26,000.
3 Part-time Instructors (15 hrs. per wk. each x 10.00 per hr. x 36 wks.)	$16,200.	
1 Part-time Para-Professional (20 hrs. per wk. x $4.40 per hr. x 36 wks.)	3,168.	
Supplies and Books	5,000.	
Miscellaneous	1,632.	
	$26,000.	$26,000.

This budget reflected foundation aid funding for 20 students at $1,300. per student. The intent was to modify the budget if the foundation aid increased.

Staffing Considerations

The major part of the budget was projected to be salaries for instructional personnel. The budget projection was based on staffing consisting of:

1. A Science-Math Instructor, 15 hours per week.
2. Two English Instructors, 15 hours per week.
3. A Para-professional, 20 hours per week.

The Coordinator of Adult Education was designated to teach Social Studies and coordinate the activities of the anticipated Reading Lab.

By employing part-time personnel on an hourly basis it was believed that maximum flexibility could be achieved. This would enable adjustments in instructors work time depending on the students needs and enrollment. It was also the only logical direction to staff the new program under the parameters of a break-even program as directed by the superintendent.

Materials

The projected budget allocated $5000. for materials. Preplanning indicated that this amount would be necessary even if student enrollment fluctuation through the year.

Conclusion

The best estimates at the time seemed to indicate that the Community High School could be self-supporting if certified instructional personnel were hired on an as needed basis reflecting the pre-registration enrollment figures.

Other Considerations

Space for school programs was a precious commodity in West Fargo at the time this program was proposed. This meant that the Community High School could put a strain on already burdened facilities. The administration believed the problem could be somewhat ameliorated by housing the Community High School in the Moore Building which was being rented by the school district to house the adult education program and one kindergarten classroom. The Moore Building was conveniently located on the frontage road off Main Avenue adjacent to the North School which housed the district's administrative offices and other kindergarten classrooms. Adequate parking was also available for students.

The administrators who established the Community High School determined the program should also be housed away from the traditional high school setting. Prior indications were that students had a reluctance in returning to the scene of their failure.

It was decided that selective scheduling could optimize both space and personnel usage. To further insure that overcrowding would not occur a limit of 25 students enrolled in the program for any particular time period would be recommended.

RECOMMENDATION

When the data had been gathered the coordinator and director wrote a summary of the data in the form of a formal written proposal as requested by the superintendent. Copies of the proposal were given to the Superintendent, high school administrators and counselling staff.

The superintendent then called a meeting involving these individuals to discuss the proposal and obtain their reaction. At the meeting there appeared to be support for the concept of an alternative high school housed away from the regular high school setting, on the part of the superintendent, the adult education personnel and one high school counselor. The high school administrators and one counselor seemed concerned. There appeared to be several problems from the perspective of the high school. First, there was a fear that an alternative program would drain students away from the high school program. The principal believed that if he had a problem with a student, that student could tell him that he would leave the high school and attend the alternative program. Secondly, there was the belief that the alternative program would be a "watered-down" high school program which would enable students to obtain easier credits through the correspondence and tutoring format in a shorter time than the regular high school. Thirdly, all the extra-curricular activities that were available at the high school would not be available at the alternative program. Fourthly, the high school administrators did not want the alternative students to receive the same diploma as the students in his program. Finally, the high school personnel did not like the

reading requirement component that the coordinator had placed in the proposal. It was the coordinator's contention that students who were enrolled in an accelerated program, which in fact is what the alternative high school was proposed to be, could obtain credits at a faster rate than at the regular high school. To do this the students should obtain a proficiency in reading to be able to handle the material. The reading requirement in the proposal stated that students applying to the alternative program would be tested in reading to determine their reading level. If the students fell below the norm for their grade, they would be assigned to the reading lab for part of the day. The students would not receive high school credits for the time they spent in the reading lab but rather the purpose was to give the student a better chance of succeeding in the alternative program. The high school personnel contended that many of these students had received extra help in reading all through their school career. They did not believe the reading lab proposal would make much difference.

The superintendent wanted the discrepancies in philosophy rectified before any recommendation for an alternative high school went to the school board. He stated that the coordinator and the high school administrators and counselors should meet to discuss compromises. This would be followed by another larger meeting involving the people who attended the first meeting.

Several modifications were introduced to the proposal by the time the second meeting was held. A six month waiting requirement was added for students who left the high school before they would be accepted in the alternative program. This requirement was designed

to alleviate the fears of the high school that they would lose students through a migration to the alternative program. The specific reading requirement was dropped although the coordinator would still monitor this area very closely to determine if the students had the necessary basic skills to be successful in their high school courses. A procedure was established where students could be referred from the high school to the alternative program if both staffs agreed, without the six month waiting requirement. The adult education staff and the superintendent wanted the students who obtained the required number of credits in the alternative program to graduate with a West Fargo High School diploma and be allowed to attend graduation ceremonies with the regular high school students. Again there was disagreement by the high school personnel over this proposed policy. The disagreement concerning the diploma would surface again when the proposal went to the school board.

The proposal for the alternative high school program was presented to the school board by the coordinator after an introduction by the superintendent and some brief general remarks by the director. The coordinator stated that the alternative school, which he proposed be called West Fargo Community High School, was designed to serve students who were high school drop-outs, students who had difficulty in the regular school environment and adults in the community desiring high school diplomas. The coordinator stated that West Fargo School District High School students would be charged a $20 one time registration fee unless they were terminated and a $2 fee for each course they took at the Community High School. Residents age twenty-one or older or non-resident students would pay a $30 tuition and $2 registration fee per course. Most of the

courses would be offered through a cooperative agreement with the Division of Independent Study. The Division would provide the course material and the back-up support such as grading and testing student work. The Division of Independent Study is a fully accredited high school program in the State of North Dakota so the rigid requirements of making the Community High School meet state requirements for an accredited high school would be largely side-stepped. The Community High staff would provide instruction on a tutoring basis with some formal class presentation. The superintendent stated that at least six students would have to apply for a course before the Community High School would offer it. The coordinator informed the board that seventeen students had indicated to him they would attend the school if the school board approved the program. Starting with this number of students and hiring staff according to the number of students attending, would make the Community High School self-supporting.

The presentation seemed to go well until one board member began to speak in opposition to the alternative high school students receiving the West Fargo High School Diploma. The board member articulated his opposition at great length reflecting similar views to those of the West Fargo High School personnel. This board member's point of view created a lively discussion among the total board. The president of the school board stated "just because they do not complete their education within the walls of West Fargo High does not mean they are not a West Fargo graduate". The coordinator stated he would submit a final draft of the alternative high school policies for the next school board meeting. The school board voted on the program. The vote was 3 to 2 in favor of establishing the

alternative high school. The board member who spoke in opposition said he could support the concept of the Community High School but he had grave concerns over the diploma.

The next school board meeting proved to be equally interesting. The headline in the next day's Forum read "Community High graduates won't get standard diplomas". What happened after the school board had approved the program at the previous board meeting? The school board member who most vehemently opposed the granting of the West Fargo High School diploma brought the subject up again. The coordinator was not in attendance at this meeting although the director and the high school administrators and counselors were. The board member stated "I have a difficult time believing that we can be providing the same type of learning environment and circumstances with five or six students in the same class--not necessarily dealing with the same course--how can that be considered as an equivalent to what we are giving in our classrooms at the regular high school". The superintendent responded "those students who are having difficulty in the regular school setting, may be getting even more learning from the individualized attention at the Community High School". Another board member stated "I have trouble reconciling what those 200 students (who attend West Fargo High School) have done, and stacking it up with what these people will be doing in the Community High School and saying it's the same".

The board member who led the opposition then called on the high school principal and one high school counselor for their reaction. The high school principal stated in effect, that if he was being asked his opinion, he believed the students in the Community High

School would not receive the same education as the students at West Fargo High School thus should not be granted the same diploma. The high school counselor *concurred. The same board member then moved* to approve amending the Community High School Handbook to state that students who complete seventeen credits at the community school, which is the state minimum, would get a newly-created degree requiring 17 credits. If the students wish to get a West Fargo High School diploma, they must return to the regular high school to attain the twenty credits it required. The motion passed on a 3 to 2 vote as one board member swung over to the side opposing the diploma issue. Following the decision to amend the diploma section, the school board gave its approval to the entire handbook. The superintendent then stated that seventeen students were enrolled at the Community High School. The change in effect eliminated the students in the Community High School from receiving the West Fargo High School Diploma because they are very reluctant to return to the setting where they failed. An exception to this may be students who become pregnant and wish to return after the pregnancy. This outcome was a surprise to the Superintendent, as he had assumed the philosophical differences among his staff had been resolved in earlier meetings. He had assumed his administrators would present a united front on this issue to the board.

CHANGES IN PROGRAM SINCE INCEPTION

The program offered students at the community high school has been subject to evolutionary changes. Like virtually all educational programs the Community High School is dynamic in nature, adjusting to meet student needs. The way the Community High School operates now could not totally be anticipated at the time the original proposal was presented to the school board in 1982. This section of the paper will detail the changes that have occurred and the reasons changes were enacted.

The relationship that the Community High School has developed with the Division of Independent Study is unique in the State of North Dakota. Two problems surfaced. First, the problem that developed was inherent with correspondence programs, that of the delay in mailing student's work back and forth between the programs. Even though the West Fargo Community High School and the Division of Independent Study, located on the campus of North Dakota State University, are only about five miles apart, the mail service proved too slow to accommodate the four week block system that was the backbone of the Community High School. Also the staff at the Division had a large student load per teacher which further amplified the problem of a quick turn-around of corrected student work. The superintendent of the Division and the coordinator met to see if this problem could be resolved. The superintendent was very interested in seeing the Community High School succeed and was open to alternative methods of handling student work. The resolution that was agreed upon was that the staff of the Community High School

would correct and grade all daily work of students. Beyond that, all tests except the final would be corrected and graded at the Community High School. The final exam would be administered by the Community High School staff and mailed to the Division for correction. The student's grade for the course reflect 3/5 assigned by the Community High School for daily work and unit tests and 2/5 assigned by the Division for the final exam. By having this joint grading system there is check and balance to grades awarded students built into the procedure thus eliminating the charge that the Community High School hands out easy grades. The community high school purchases the course material from the Division on an as needed basis. Textbooks are purchased and kept at the community high school for use by the students. When the books are worn out, or out of print Community High replaces them. There are no buy-back provisions as would be the norm with other Division students. The Division bills the West Fargo School District once per month for the courses that are taken by students. The school district receives foundation aid for the students attending the Community High School which makes the program self-supporting.

The arrangement that exists with the Division also enables the Community High School to operate with a reduced staff. That is because The Division can act as back-up when a specific certification is needed. This differs from the traditional approach. . A high school generally operates in one of several ways. First, it can provide traditional classes where teachers present material to students in a classroom setting over a predetermined amount of time. Secondly, an individualized program can be started where individualized courses must be developed in each of the

curriculum areas that constitute a high school curriculum. Under this arrangement students generally move through the curriculum at basically their own pace with perhaps some predetermined minimums and maximums for the amount of work that must be completed. The West Fargo Community High School has evolved into a highbred of these two concepts.

The Community High School staff being held to the tight restriction set by the West Fargo Superintendent of Schools of having the program remain self-supporting decided it would be unproductive to reinvent the wheel and develop all its own courses when the Division had a complete accredited individualized high school curriculum already in place. In reality, the directive from the superintendent led to a unique and creative relationship with the Division to solve this financial restriction. The State of North Dakota has established criteria for the amount of time students must spend in school to receive credit in high school courses. Similar restrictions also apply when school districts are to receive state foundation aid monies for students attending school. To speak to these problems and also to enable the coordinator to better plan the course offerings a block system was established.

When first enrolling in the Community High School, the student develops an educational program consisting of four credits (eight 1/2 credit classes). Enrolling the student for four credits complies with the state requirement for enrollment. Due to the block system, the student will take two classes during a four week block; upon completion of the initial courses, subsequent courses

are selected. In reality though very few students are able to complete a course of study in the four week block. Normally extensions of time are needed by the student to finish the course material. The inability of many students to conform to the block system results from the lack of motivation and low reading levels possessed by the majority of the students attending the West Fargo Community High School. The coordinator maintains that the four week block system is very useful to him in talking to students about setting goals for pacing the completion of the course and as mentioned, for planning purposes. Extensions to the four week block are given to students who are working to their capacity. If the coordinator believes the student did not work up to his potential, the students would have to pay a $2 fee for the course extension. Discussion is presently taking place relating to the merits of letting the community high school evolve into a totally individualized program.

The staffing pattern has changed to a certain extent from the way it was envisioned when the program was proposed. The original proposal called for three part-time instructors and one part-time para-professional. The community high school is now operating with two part-time instructors and one full-time para-professional along with another para-professional that is used for office support. The office employee is funded through an elderly jobs program at no cost to the district. Experience has taught the administration at the Community High School that para-professionals can be very cost effective and meet the needs of students in many ways in an individualized program. The para-professionals who have worked in the program have either been graduates of the West Fargo Community

High School or a similar program. The administration looks for employees who were very good students. It is necessary for the para- professional to understand in-depth, the courses that are offered through the Division. The para-professional is directed by the professional staff and works hand-in-hand with them. This close working relationship is necessary if the para-professional is to be properly utilized. The value of para-professionals can again be focused back to the superintendent's directive to make the program self-supporting. The greater use of the para-professional versus hiring additional professional staff has allowed the Community High School to better serve the students by having another helper available for a longer period of time at less cost.

The Division of Independent Study has also benefitted from the close working relationship with West Fargo Community High School. Because of the close proximity tests are often driven directly to the Division by a member of the Community High staff when the number warrants it and a quick return is required. The Division staff also benefits from receiving direct feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the course material from a high school program that uses the materials on a daily basis. Reaction from the Community High School staff to the material has resulted in several courses being updated or modified in some way to make them more accurate to better serve the student. When the Community High School has discovered a need for a course not offered at the Division one has been developed. Examples are courses in consumer math, pre-algebra and computers. Approval must be granted from the superintendent before a new course can be offered.

CHANGES NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN THE ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL CONCEPT

The ability to provide educational options to students above the magic age of twenty-one is a major problem for the North Dakota educational system. High school students above the age of twenty-one are usually consigned to an adult education program with the G.E.D. as the only educational goal available. Many of the older students have already completed tenth or eleventh grade and wish to attend classes and obtain a high school diploma. But because of the way programs are funded, the cost of attaining the desired diploma is prohibitive. This at a time when there is a distinct belief among employers that the G.E.D. test is too easy and does not give a good indication that a student has mastered twelfth grade material. Thus many employers have lost confidence in the test and prefer hiring applicants with high school diplomas.

In an attempt to remedy this situation the West Fargo Adult Education staff tries to counsel students who are within seven credits of high school graduation to utilize the Division of Independent Study in obtaining a high school diploma. The staff spells out the costs, explains the procedures and offers the use of the Community High School texts on a no cost basis, thus uniting the services of the alternative program with the adult education program. Yet even though the cost may seem minimal relative to other educational cost, it is often restrictive to an individual who can barely make ends meet.

Therefore, the main problem with the situation is funding. State Foundation Aid to school districts is designed to handle

students through age 21. Adult education programs are mandated to spend 80% of the time working with students who are functioning below an eight grade level. Adult education programs do not have real control of who walks through their door and requests services. They do not have control over what level the student is functioning at. There are many ways this situation is handled. The West Fargo adult Education program counts students in the 80% group who are working at the eight grade level or below, if they are below that grade level in only one area of basic skills. Most of the students who first enter the adult education program are working below the eight grade level in at least one subject area. Additionally, adult education programs are not funded in most instances to serve the student the number of hours that would be required to properly educate the adult high school student. The point here is that adult education programs are not mandated to serve large numbers of secondary students over age 21. Indeed, adult education programs where established to serve the least educated and most in need. Thus, the student who is over 21 years of age and wants to complete a traditional high school program is not served by the foundation aid formula or by adult education in an adequate manner. The school district then has choices it can make: it may not serve the student at all, it may provide a G.E.D completion program only through adult education, it may charge the student the cost of education, or it may absorb the extra cost of the education.

Adequate funding for this age student is an area that should be addressed at the state level. One could assume that there are students over age 21 in almost every community who have been out of high school for a few years and did not obtain a diploma but now may

be interested in returning on a limited basis to the regular high school in the community. The school district should have the opportunity to serve that student and at the same time receive State Foundation Aid while that student attends the high school. To be realistic, obtaining such a change in the State Foundation Aid Formula in time of economic recession in the State of North Dakota would be extremely difficult. The need is there, however, and this change should be pegged as a future goal.

Another change that could improve alternative education would be an enrollment cap based upon space and size of the district. It has been the contention of the Community High School administration that the program will not become truly stable until a cap is placed on the number of students who can attend. The cap would protect the program from the population of students out-stripping the resources of space and staff. A cap would also ensure a stable population of students which would be translated into a stable funding base that would be much easier to predict in relation to the amount of foundation aid that could be generated. By knowing the number of students that the program would serve in a given year the financial planning would be similar to a regular high school which is able to predict within a small percentage the number of students that will attend.

A cap on the number of students resulting in a waiting list of students who are ready to attend when an opening occurs, would send a strong message to the students presently enrolled in the Community High School. The administration has strong points to talk to the students about in the areas of discipline, attendance, and

satisfactory progress in their studies. The fact that someone else is waiting to take their place if they are not willing to abide by the established rules is in itself a motivating factor to the students. Because the students who attend the Community High School attend because they were not successful in a regular high school setting, either from an academic standpoint, or socially, or a combination of those two, a set of workable rules and expectations must be clearly communicated to the students to enable the Community High School to properly serve their needs. The Community High School administration does terminate students at the present time who do not adhere to the established rules. The problem of funding, though, is always at the back of the administrator's mind. They must ensure a proper student base to generate enough revenue to meet the financial needs of the program. By necessity some compromises are made from time to time in relation to whether a student should be terminated or given another chance.

To complement the capping system a change should be made concerning the six month waiting period. The Community High School administration believes that the six month waiting period for students who drop out of the traditional high school should be discontinued. The fact that a cap would result in a waiting list would in itself create a natural waiting period that would deter immediate entry from the traditional high school. At the same time, funding the Community High School based on a predetermined number of students to be served, would lend a great deal of stability to the school.

Another aid in the delivery of alternative education in North Dakota would be providing child care services for mothers while they are attending classes. Currently the West Fargo Adult Education Program offers a baby-sitting service to parents who attend G.E.D. sessions in the evening. The program, by offering this service directly meets the guidelines established at the federal level to provide support services to make it possible for adults to attend adult education classes. West Fargo was the first program in the state (and with the data available still the only one) to offer child care services. It was only natural that this concern for the adult women who needed this service, would translate into a concern for the teenage mother whose needs for this service are just as critical. But when baby-sitting services for the unwed teenage mother is broached, the idea becomes controversial.

Presently, West Fargo Community High School allows the teenage mother to bring her child to school with her. A room is provided with appropriate cribs, high chairs and toys. But child care has to be provided by the mother herself. Not the most ideal situation, and yet this bare bones concern for the teenage mother erupted in controversy that resulted in restricting even this type of child care. Concerns were expressed by the high school principal and one of the counselors that by allowing the teenage mothers to bring her child to school with her, the Community High staff was encouraging young girls to keep their children rather than place them for adoption. Further, the policy inhibited the student from attending a real high school where extra-curricular activities were available. The staff of Community High maintained that the mother based a decision to keep the child on their maternal interest not on whether

a school was available that allowed her to bring the baby while she attended. In addition, legitimate service was being provided for those mothers who kept their child who in the past could not complete their education because no school was available that would provide child care. The records of the past are replete with mothers who could not return to school.

Compromise was reached, but even in the compromise there appeared an air of unreality to the reasoning. The girl could bring her child until the child was twelve months of age. Then she would either return to the traditional high school or drop-out altogether. In some cases this would give the student chance to graduate, but in most cases the student was again faced with the problem of dropping out of school because she could not afford to have her parents pay - or she pay - for baby-sitting services while she attended the traditional school full-time.

Alternative education could be strengthened by acknowledging that a certain percentage of teenage mothers are going to keep their babies regardless of circumstances. Facing-up to this fact of life, the emotionalism of the issue can be removed and the necessary services provided so that the unwed teenage mother has a successful future. By providing a baby-sitting service for all mothers who would like to attain their high school diploma in an alternative school, the state or school district would be recognizing a very cost effective manner of providing educational opportunities to a segment of the population that has traditionally been overlooked.

In many cases the attainment of a high school education would remove the young unwed mother from the welfare role and give them renewed hope in the future.

Historically, alternative programs have had a difficult time gaining recognition and true acceptance in school districts. This frame of mind is no exception in West Fargo. The perception that the Community High School exists outside any established regular educational program is evident with both staff and other administrators. There is the perception that the Community High School is easy and that the staff coddles to the student's needs. This is understandable because the same attitude is prevalent at other levels such as the State Department of Public Instruction. The superintendent has been supportive of the Community High School from its inception or the school would not have been started, nor would it have been able to continue. It is difficult to envision this degree of understanding in the school district as a whole. However, there does appear to be a realization from the high school administration and counselors that it is advantageous to them to have the Community High School in the district where they are able to transfer their problem students.

Teacher certification is another area of concern. This is because the State Department of Public Instruction does not have a way of accounting for the instructor's time spent in a subject area or the grade level at which the instructor is functioning. The D.P.I. requires each certified educator to fill out an MIS 103 form each fall. The responses on the form are used to gather data to ensure that each teacher in the state is certified to teach in the

areas assigned to them. Filling out the MIS 103 form for the D.P.I. results in an annual rejection of the forms filled out by the teachers in the West Fargo Community High School. This in spite of a long explanatory letter that accompanies the forms. A simple way around this problem would be for the D.P.I. to recognize the alternative high school instructor by providing a category on the MIS 103 form that would account for their unique position. A teacher could be categorized in a subject area, for example, math - alternative high school instructor. As it now stands, no special category is provided for the alternative instructor who may teach a number of different subjects during a given enrollment period. The end result is that the teacher in an alternative program may very well generate "gigs" or point deductions toward accommodation of the secondary school. This problem has occurred in West Fargo and is difficult to resolve. The other aspect of not complying with the established norms asked for on the form is the D.P.I.'s interpretation that the teachers are only teaching in a particular subject area for a fraction of the day. This interpretation can in fact cause the alternative teacher to lose certification when it comes time for that teacher to renew his teaching certificate. The certification of alternative education teachers is an area that is indeed need of attention.

SUMMARY

This section of the paper discussed problems in providing a quality alternative education program to a community and made recommendations that would improve alternative programs in North Dakota. The recommendations were as follows:

1. Establish stable funding
2. Set alternative educational programs being on an equal footing with other educational programs
3. Provide funding for students above age 21
4. Provide child care for all students requiring such
5. Establish a new state classification to certify teachers in alternative programs

IMPLEMENTATION IN OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS

To determine if components of the West Fargo model can be successfully implemented in other school districts further research is needed to determine what the needs of other school district are relative to alternative education. While it is risky at best to predict the successful implementation of an educational model in another local school situation, there does appear to be components of the West Fargo Community High School model that could be useful to other school districts. Areas for consideration are:

A. Alternative high school programs could be a benefit to
   1. School districts with a population of students who do not function well with the regular high school
   2. Small districts that want to augment a limited curriculum and at the same time keep cost down
   3. Adult education programs as an alternative to the G.E.D.

B. Implementation could occur through a cooperative arrangement with the Division of Independent Study
   1. Under the control of the Division of Independent Study
   2. Under control of a local director with cooperation of the Division of Independent Study

The utilization of the Division of Independent Study enables a school to begin an alternative high school program with limited staff and facilities. The utilization of services already in the state creates a cost-effective model.

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